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White Woman.
From Karen Blixen's Literature to Vibeke Tandberg's Digital Photography

Major African civilizations were known in Europe since the Middle Ages. It was the early European travel literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth century though, that gave rise to the idea of Africa as the Dark Continent. According to Gunther Pakendorf, many of these authors described landscapes and people that they had only seen in paintings and read about in adventure stories.[1] This same phenomenon is also true for the descriptions of travels found in eighteenth century fiction.[2] As unreliable as we know they were, the early descriptions of Africa still made their readers believe in the idea of the Dark Continent: untouched by civilized man, like a virgin, wild and difficult to penetrate – with hidden treasures inside. The Africans themselves, who never slept under a roof and had no recognizable religion were also regarded as wild, exotic and dangerous animals.[3] The Dark Continent and its inhabitants exerted a power of fascination in European literature.

The ideas that this early literature spawned were confirmed during the latter half of the nineteenth century, when missionaries like David Livingstone and Mary Slessor published their diaries. They were soon followed by journalists such as Henry Morton Stanley and even later by colonizers who returned to these literary images in their descriptions of Africa. It appears as though some of the books they may have read taught them what to see in Africa and how to describe it. To be sure, the increasing European knowledge of Africa was based on the paradigm of the Dark Continent: whereas Africa was seen as unmapped and uncivilized, Africans themselves were regarded as having no respectable culture of their own. The main movement in the discourse on Africa remained the journey, presented as the act of penetrating an unknown, wild and virginal

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1 PAKENDORF: 2003, 32.

2 In Ann RADCLIFF'S *The Mysteries of Udolfo* (1794), for instance, a journey from England to Italia is described according to well-known paintings. Sørensen and Togeby have shown that as late as 1935 Karen Blixen described the roads around Pisa on the basis of paintings (SØRENSEN and TOGEBY: 2001).

3 PAKENDORF: 2003, 32.

landscape. This discourse is obviously highly sexualised, and many of the stories have a meta-fictional framework presenting the circumstances of the voyage. The narrative itself is thus presented as the result of a masculine exploration of unknown territory. According to tradition, Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) insists on being a true story about a white man who penetrates the South African jungle and in doing so endangers his life. Inside the wilderness, he successfully faces all the challenges that befall him with a brave heart and an open mind. He survives, gets rich, and then writes this book. However, the main reason for this journey was to find a lost white man; a mission that was successful. Similarly, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) describes a white man's journey into the wilds of Africa in the footsteps of a lost white man – just like Stanley looking for Livingstone. Stanley seems to have added a new element to the old discourse of the adventurous male journeys. Conrad's narrator, Marlow, repeats the pattern of Stanley and Haggard: Along his journey through an increasingly wild landscape he encounters local black people who become more and more dangerous as the natural surroundings close in on him. Like Haggard, Conrad makes it clear that for whites, Africa means profit. Unlike Haggard, Conrad clearly warns of the consequences of exploiting Africa – less for the sake of the Africans than for the Europeans themselves. When Marlow finally meets up with the lost Kurtz, he discovers that Kurtz has adjusted to the wilderness. More clearly than his predecessors, Conrad presents a white man ›smitten‹ by darkness. Darkness is associated with chaos; it is not only an outer, but also an inner state of mind. Africa has, in Conrad's version, stripped the white man of his civilized manners – what is left of him is a greediness that is beyond civilization.

The literary descriptions of Africa increased during the early years of colonization and the old discourse of the Dark Continent may have reached its peak in the 1930s with publications such as Ernest Hemingway's novel *Green Hills of Africa* in 1931 and Graham Greene's travel account *Journey without Maps* in 1936. Both of these authors' works convey the same old image of Africa as a wild, not yet mapped landscape, a site for adventurous travels. Hemingway's protagonist is, typically, a hunter; Greene's protagonist – a traveller mapping Africa along his way. Whereas Greene deliberately uses the virgin metaphor for the land and people, Hemingway describes the conversations between men around an

open fire. Neither of them portrays the natives as trustworthy, nor gives women a central position in their descriptions of the continent.

In *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said uses the term ›White Man‹ to depict a certain type of cultural arrogance developed by white settlers and rulers in the colonies. White Man though, is also a literary style known from pre-colonial literature. During colonialism the well-known literary style inspired the whites' way of defining themselves in real life, as superior compared to natives. The arrogance from the old discourse was transferred to the colonial state of affairs.[4] Haggard, Conrad, Hemingway and Greene repeat and confirm this image of the White Man as superior to blacks, and by doing so they of course mirror the colonial point of view on blacks and whites.

The colonial fiction about Africa from the 1930s as well as images from fiction written during the 1880s and '90s can be seen as a remediation of early travel literature. According to Bolter and Grusin's *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (1999), remediation implies that the content in one medium is being transferred to another in such a way that it is obvious that the same content is repeated in a new manner.[5] Remediation influences both the new and the old media in that the new medium that replaces the old one, brings to mind the old medium that it replaces. In this way a dialogue between old and new arises.[6] Hemingway's and Greene's works have a closer relationship to the landscape they describe and the persons inhabiting it than Conrad's and Haggard's, not to mention the adventurous travel literature from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Still, Hemingway and Greene convey the original images by transferring their discourse on Africa into the literature of their own time. It then becomes obvious that both this new discourse, as well as the old one, are not only masculine and sexualised but also racist and ethnocentric: Africa and Africans appear as a contrast to Europe and Europeans. The presentation of the foreign thus serves as an inverse presentation of the familiar white, European, male, narrative selves.

Even these ›late‹ works immediately become objects of remediation. Already in 1937, Karen Blixen rewrites the by now well-known tale of the White Man in Africa in *Den afrikanske farm* (literally, The African

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4 SAID: 1978, 226–228.

5 BOLTER and GRUSIN: 1999, 45.

6 Ebd., 50.

Farm), as it is called in Danish, or *Out of Africa,* as it is titled in English. The English version was published under Blixen's pseudonym, Isak Dinesen. Blixen's remediation made White Woman appear on the literary scene, and the feminization of White Man into White Woman renewed the literary discourse on Africa. The travel metaphor became less dominant, the coupling of darkness and virginity weakened, and the conquest metaphor was highly questioned. In short: the masculine conquest is exchanged with a feminine discourse of caretaking. Although Blixen questions the ethnocentricity, the cultural arrogance persists. First and foremost however, it becomes obvious how gendered the old discourse was. Like those before her, Blixen wrote under the colonial paradigm (the racist element of the old discourse on Africa was not questioned until postcolonialism). Thus, when *Out of Africa* becomes an object of remediation, as in Vibeke Tandberg's digital photographic series *Aftermath* from 1994, we have an example of the final (?) deconstruction of the images used to constitute the discourse on Africa.

Here I will present Blixen's and Tandberg's contributions to the European tale of the White Man in Africa and discuss the cultural arrogance that Said tends to overlook, that of the White Woman.

In their remediation, both Blixen and Tandberg quote the cultural arrogance of the White Man – but exchange man with woman. Quoting in this context means a meeting between art and literature, or more accurately a meeting between iconography and intertextuality according to Mieke Bal's definition in *Quoting Caravaggio. Contemporary Art. Preposterous History* (1999). In her definition, iconography is a re-employment of previously used forms, patterns and figures. Intertextuality she defines in agreement with Bakhtin as an active reference to a sign that has already been given its signification through older texts.[7] The history

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7 See BAL: 1999, 8. The definition of intertextuality is more disputed than Bal indicates. Kristeva introduced the term in 1966 (KRISTEVA: 1984a, 65) when she presented Bakhtin's ideas about the dialogic character of language and literature to the European literary scene. She defines intertextuality as a description of how literary texts enter into dialogue with each other. In her dissertation from 1974 (KRISTEVA: 1984b), however, Kristeva uses the term transposition instead of intertextuality. She defines transposition as a transfer of one or more systems of signs in relation to each other (ibid., 59–60). Genette develops the term transtextuality as a common denominator of the various forms that a literary text can assume in respect to another text. Intertextuality is only one of these forms, and it is defined as the explicit presence of a quotation from one text in another (GENETTE: 1997, 4).

painting is one example of quoting in that its visual motif could be a textual, Biblical parable. While Blixen quotes the Bible's myth about paradise in *Out of Africa*, Tandberg's photographical work quotes motifs from Blixen's text.[8] In exchanging White Man with White Woman, new problems arise and old ones are given a new twist. Furthermore, both works reflect a consciousness about the fact that they remediate and quote something that has already been laid to rest.[9] By a conscious remediation of a content that is no longer valid these works point to an ethical dimension which is connected to the old discourse.

What characterizes Tandberg's account is that it is presented through a new medium. *Aftermath* recreates content known from literary texts in such a manner that we recognize it as a recreation of old images in a new form. This effectively creates a fresh perspective on the interpretation. With *Aftermath* we have definitely entered the postcolonial paradigm; I shall therefore use *Aftermath* to discuss the significance of repetition inside various cultural paradigms. In quoting Blixen, Tandberg presents White Woman as an old-fashioned but still living phenomenon, thus paving the way for a new discussion on the relationship between feminism and racism.

The Lost Image of Africa

Out of Africa was written in English. According to Judith Thurman, Blixen's original intention was to call her book *Ex Africa*, but her editor persuaded her to choose the less pompous title *Out of Africa*.[10] *Ex Africa* connotes something that has ended: ›Africa is no more‹. *Out of Africa* connotes someone or something leaving Africa. *Den afrikanske farm* (The African Farm) does not contain any of these aspects, but directs at-

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8 Karen Blixen studied drawing in Copenhagen in 1902–03 and painting in 1903–06. In the spring of 1910 she took classes in Paris (ASMUSSEN: 2002, 6). While in Kenya she painted several pictures with an African motif. SØRENSEN and TOGEBY: 2001 discuss the influence of Italian art on »The Roads around Pisa« (1935). Charlotte ENGBERG: 2002 discusses traces of art in several of Blixen's works. ENGBERG: 2000 discusses Blixen's essay on the predecessor of photography, daguerreotypy.

9 ENGBERG: 2000 argues that in most of Blixen's works the past is very consciously recreated. For a close discussion of Blixen's concept of time see Tone Selboe's article in this volume.

10 THURMAN: 1982, 286.

tention toward the farm itself, the special place where the story is centred. The farm is thus given the honour of representing the entire continent.

The three titles offer different points of view for the interpretation. Furthermore, several structures can be traced throughout the text which might also lead the interpreter to read it in more than one way. It is an autobiography, a utopia, a dystopia and a documentary novel – but it is perhaps best known as an autobiography. As such, it is a poetical rewriting of how Karen Blixen transformed herself into an author by failing as a farmer. The utopia is best characterized as a pastoral. For although *Out of Africa* deals with lions instead of sheep, the narrator and her friends worship art and nature. Just as the shepherds in the pastorals, they idolize life close to nature. Nonetheless, there are serious cracks in this idyll. The narrator herself is in fact a farmer trying to earn her living from the land. And she fails. The dystopia is the breakdown of the ideal due to the rise of a monetary economy.

Blixen's documentary is based upon this dystopia. Her accounts of Africa are written from the farm's perspective and at the time of the narration, the farm is already a lost cause. This dystopian element also leads to the documentary description of how Africa is ill-treated by both capitalism and the colonial government. The ethical component, which is explicit in this work, is based upon the failed utopia: the farm was the ideal society, a model for how the colonial government should also have treated Africa and Africans.

Out of Africa however, begins at the point where this utopia is lost. Nevertheless, the ideal remains as an ethical reflection. Symbolized by the antelope Lulu, who is both wild and tame, the relationship between man and nature is ideal on the farm. Only on the farm does the relationship between whites and blacks balance effortlessly. The civilization on the farm works side by side with nature by respecting and partaking in its natural order rather than destructively interfering.

The idea is that Africa has a natural order and Africans a natural hierarchy. The Somali people are presented as being aristocrats in their mind thinking about themselves as superior to other blacks. The Masaiis are interpreted as warriors, and the Kikuyu people as slaves. Every group of people has their special sense of dignity and role. The whites are placed on top of the pyramid. The whites around the farm are aristocrats on a higher level than the Somalis. The complete system works like a natural

feudal society where everyone has their special task to do and everyone is of equal importance. Such is the utopia in *Out of Africa*.

This societal pattern is recognizable from the European Middle Ages however, with the emergence of capitalism and colonialism this old form of society dissolves. The white middle class does not adjust to the African society and does not relate to the African version of feudal hierarchical values. White middle class people thus, do not fit in. As opposed to the adventurous white aristocrats, who smoothly placed themselves on top of the pyramid, they have solely one intention – to earn money.

Blixen raises an ethical discussion within the colonial paradigm: The relationship between societies is presented as a contradiction between black and white. Black represents nature, primitivism, tolerance, history, a connection to the past and consciousness of roles. White represents technology, freedom, power, intolerance and civilization. Blacks and whites thus represent different centuries, and Africans exist in a century that for Europeans belongs in the past. The main crime of colonialism is that it brings European civilization into a society where it does not belong, because Africa has not undergone the different historical phases which serve as the basis for European civilization. Africa cannot be expected to shift from its natural phase into civilization as colonialism forces it to. This is one of the explicit main ideas in the book – an idea that was widely accepted in the 1930s when *Out of Africa* was written. However, the black and white dichotomy is not totally stable throughout the work. Some white people can move between the two: those who are in contact with the past, the same ones who rightly possess cultural arrogance i.e. White Man and White Woman. They belong on top of the African hierarchical pyramid, whereas the other white people in Africa harm Africans as well as White Man and Woman.

At the end of *Out of Africa*, the bankruptcy of the farm is described as the total breakdown of an era that ›is‹ Africa: the coffee harvest is too small to carry the costs, the grasshoppers eat the squatters' corn crop, the farm is sold, and the ideal feudal society must come to an end. The land is parcelled out for bungalows and the squatters are forced to move. It is capitalism that overtakes the farm and it is the entry of the middle class in the colonial administration that overtakes Africa. After the farm is sold, Kinanjui, the chief of the Kikuyu dies, and then finally the English aristocrat Denys Finch-Hatton dies as well. When the farm, which along with chief Kikuyu represents Africa, dies, the aristocrats die too. According to

Blixen, pride, dignity, role consciousness and awareness of tradition are African traits that are shared by the European aristocrats. The farm, old Africa, and the White Man and Woman die for the same reason – time has overtaken them. Africa's true aristocratic era is now gone; the ideal feudal society where nature and civilization were in harmony is history. It turns out though, that just as the leader at the top of the pyramid is unable to remain in place due to the demands of European capitalism, the natives too are incapable of entering roles other than the ones they had in the well-organized, natural feudal society that the farm represented.

> The Natives of the farm, in the stark realism of their souls, were conscious of the situation and of my state of mind, as fully as if I had been lecturing to them upon it, or had written it down for them in a book. All the same, they looked to me for help and support, and did not, in a single case, attempt to arrange their future for themselves. [...] There is a paradoxical moment in the relation between the leaders and the followers: that they should see every weakness and failing in him so clearly, and be capable of judging him with such unbiased accuracy, and yet should still inevitably turn to him, as if in life there were, physically, no way round him. A flock of sheep may be feeling the same towards the herd-boy, they will have infinitely better knowledge of the country and the weather than he, and still will be walking after him, if needs be, straight into the abyss.[11]

The racist thoughts that are frequently visible in this work through the comparisons of natives and animals can be seen as part of the cultural arrogance of the White Man and Woman which constitutes the culture of colonialism. However, they are also interwoven in the feudal ideal that is part of the work's specific utopia and dystopia.

Just as the farm represents the continent, and the farm's demise represents Africa's demise, the narrator's story represents the continent's story. Karen Blixen thus, makes herself into Africa's author in a way which is slightly reminiscent of how T.E. Lawrence made himself the representative of Arabic history – at least according to Edward W. Said. Said emphasizes that Lawrence seemed to overlook the fact that he was just a participant in history, not history himself.[12] Blixen's narrator can be accused of the same.

According to Said's definition, White Man was originally a literary style. Blixen's remediation brings the stories about the Dark Continent back to mind: in the old narratives, White Man conquered the black

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11 DINESEN: 1938, 331.

12 SAID: 1978, 243.

man's land and produced books about it. In Blixen's version, written at the end of the style's era, White Man is exchanged with White Woman. She takes care of the black man and produces a book about it. Actually, *Out of Africa* might be read as a response to Ernest Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa*, which deals with a white hunter in the wilds of Africa. Whereas Hemingway describes the adventure and the long talks around the campfire – man to man – Blixen describes the farm, representing Africa, as a society. Whereas Hemingway describes the White Man as a travelling hunter, Blixen describes a woman staying at home, taking care of the farm's land and people. Whereas Hemingway reflects about how white people are exploiting the African earth to such a degree that it dries out, Blixen describes a female coffee farmer who builds a lake and puts fish in it, arranges a school for the native children, drives them to hospital when necessary or takes care of their wounds herself. When she has spare time she visits the Somali women because she enjoys being in their company so much. Karen Blixen's protagonist is a female counterpart to White Man. Like Hemingway and the Africans, she must give way to the capitalism of the white middle class. Unlike the Africans but analogous to Hemmingway, this experience provides her with a reason to give voice to herself in a book about White Woman in Africa.

Some feminist readers want to save Blixen from the racist label, in particular Susan Hardy Aiken in *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative* (1990). Aiken argues that Blixen's authorship is a gendered discourse and that *Out of Africa* takes its place in the complete oeuvre as a convincing positioning of the feminine stance. She suggests that Blixen uncovers connections between the politics and poetics of colonialism and gender difference. Since the Western cultural definition of women is strikingly similar to the definition of Africans, both groups are subordinate and naturally rate second. Both therefore, can only be accepted when they remain in ›their place‹. *Out of Africa* writes itself into the European discourse on Africa by being based on racist tropes and figures. However, Aiken contends that it undermines the ethnocentric way of thinking about land, territories, people and gender.[13] She thereby reasons that Blixen's contribution to the colonial discourse in fact actually destabilizes it.

This appears to be a serious simplification of the racism in *Out of Africa*. I find it more fruitful to consider the relationship between feminism

13 AIKEN: 1990, 39.

and racism, and thus will place my focus here in the following. I would now like to discuss a work of art which, by constituting a remediation of the image of White Woman, accentuates this disturbing relationship between feminism and racism.

Implementing Uneasiness

With Vibeke Tandberg's digital photographic work *Aftermath* (1994) we have moved into the postcolonial paradigm and changed medium. Nevertheless, the content and motifs stay the same – White Woman is definitely not dead. The artwork consists of a series of digital photographs which, at first glance, appear to document the White Woman in Africa.

Figure 1: Vibeke Tandberg: Aftermath #1, 1994. Printed with courtesy of c/o – Atle Gerhardsen/Berlin

Aftermath #1 shows an old-fashioned hospital ward with a big cross on the long, right-hand wall. There are only two patients, both children, one of them possibly in his early teens, the other a young child with his back to the spectator. At the centre of the picture, we see a young white nurse standing with her hands gathered in front of her stomach – in short, in a classic position for a female portrait. *Aftermath* #2 depicts the same woman ›off duty‹, sitting on the ground with some African women and their children, eagerly engaged in a friendly conversation in front of a hut with a straw roof. *Aftermath* #3 shows her in front of a slightly bigger

house (a school perhaps?), talking to two teenage boys and a young mother carrying one child in her arm and holding another by the hand. Four men are standing just beyond the main group. The white woman is still dressed in the same frock, but in this picture it might function as a teacher's frock rather than a nurse's uniform. She is the only one facing the photographer frontally.

Aus Urheberrechtsgründen kann die Grafik nur in der gedruckten Fassung erscheinen.

Due to restricted copyright the picture can only appear in the printed version.

Figure 2: Vibeke Tandberg: *Aftermath* #4, 1994. Printed with courtesy of c/o – Atle Gerhardsen/Berlin

Aftermath #4 depicts the same woman squatting in a coffee field with a man her own age (Is she teaching him about farming?).

In *Aftermath* #5 she is definitely depicted as a schoolmistress – turning the school boys' attention to the letters on the blackboard with a pointer. They are all seated on the ground; she is the authority – not only because she is the teacher, but also because she is standing up and taking up so much more space. However, in *Aftermath* #6 she is squatting in a green landscape again, bending down in front of an African, as if his leg preoccupies her. Her eyes though are turned upward, towards his face as if she is listening to him. *Aftermath* #7 depicts her with a woman with a child in her right arm and even though she is halfway hidden behind the mother, she is the one to which we direct our attention. We see how happy she makes the mother by admiring her child.

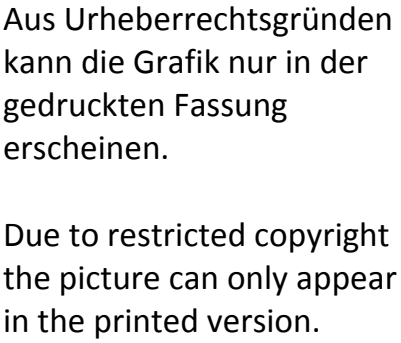

Figure 3: Vibeke Tandberg: *Aftermath* #7, 1994. Printed with courtesy of c/o – Atle Gerhardsen/Berlin

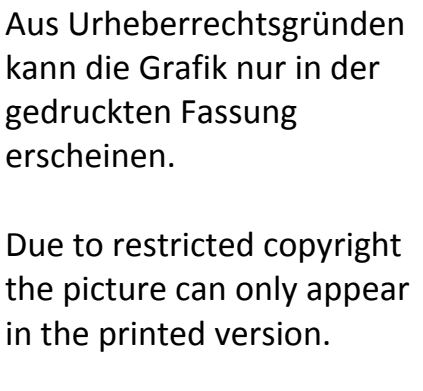

Figure 4: Vibeke Tandberg: *Aftermath* #8, 1994. Printed with courtesy of c/o – Atle Gerhardsen/Berlin

In *Aftermath* #8 she is standing on the seashore with some boys admiring a fish in the same way. The children (who perhaps caught the fish?) are obviously equally happy and proud. *Aftermath* #9 depicts the white woman squatting again, this time at the centre of a group of smaller children, mostly girls. It looks as if she is teaching them something (perhaps what kind of branches they should bring home to the fire?). Finally, in *After-*

math #10 she is standing in front of a helicopter with a box in her hands – probably containing medicine.

As the above presentation of *Aftermath* should have demonstrated, these tableaux invite the spectator to interpret and draw conclusions. We add what is not there to construct a meaning, and we ›hear‹ what the protagonist says – like ›Oh, what a beautiful baby‹, and ›How clever of you guys to catch such a big fish all on your own!‹ At first these installations seem to invite a discussion on the discourse of ›the good Samaritan‹. As Lars Einar Sørli writes, the pictures are tableaux of different noble deeds such as nursing sick people, teaching children to read and their fathers modern agriculture, giving out medicine to the needy, and instructing mothers how best to nurse their babies. Pretty soon though, we notice the protagonist's white socks with red and blue stripes. They might be interpreted as ironically connoting ›Norwegian-ness‹, which leads us to conclude that this artwork also invites us to discuss the official Norwegian image as a peace and humanitarian aid in the world.[14]

After a while it becomes slightly uncomfortable to look at this artwork. It insists on transferring the colonial discourse, which we are taught to regard as old-fashioned, into our post-colonial era. Therefore it makes us slightly uneasy and it is this feeling of uneasiness that I would now like to explore. What is it about? How is it implemented in the artwork and what consequences does the uneasiness arouse? The answers, I will argue, concern our own attitude towards Africa and ourselves.

In these photographs a number of people are visible, but the White Woman is undoubtedly the protagonist. She is the only one who stands out as remarkably different and she is the only one present in every photograph. She might be a nurse or a missionary, but she is also a schoolteacher and an expert in agronomy. In every picture she appears in a new role; all of which might be characterized as helpful and caring. Furthermore, we notice how happy everyone is – the White Woman is happy to help and the natives are happy to receive her contributions. What is most striking however, is the white frock that she wears in every picture. It serves at least two different functions. First, it underlines her skin by doubling what we already see: she is white, and she is the only one who is white. Moreover, as described above, she has a different, but distinguished role to play in every scene. The white frock might therefore be a

14 SØRLI: 2004, 100.

nursing uniform or a doctor's frock, or it might be a schoolmistress's work uniform or that of the advising agronomist. It seems to be an emblem for help, assistance, and support, which brings us to the frock's other function: it teaches us that the white woman does not belong in Africa but that she is no tourist either. Whereas Blixen's protagonist stayed in Africa as a colonial farmer, Tandberg's white woman ›solely‹ assists the blacks. The frock turns her into the white woman helping the natives, doubling the skin that represents her essence. The White Woman is essentially a helping hand. The distance between her and those who receive her help is what this artwork is about. The White Woman is totally superior to them all.

Aftermath presents a message we perceive as out of date. It tells us something we do not accept and therefore we easily perceive it as an ironic statement or, more accurately, as several theatrically staged tableaux. The protagonist's staged attitude is marked; thus the White Woman's identity does not seem to be authentic. Compared with the authentic Africans, she must be characterized as explicitly theatrical.[15] Her theatrical identity is realized against their ›ethnic‹ authenticity. This alone makes her more modern than they are: Whereas, she stages her own performance, they do not stage anything – they ›are‹.

The White Woman has only one property, which works in different ways depending on the context. The frock makes her into a missionary or an agricultural advisor or something else depending on the environment. So it is our interpretation of the environment that gives the frock its status and the protagonist her identity. We create her according to our interpretation of the Africans that constitute her environment. It is our gaze that creates her as White Woman, not the gazes of the other people in the photos. We take them into account, but only as part of the backdrop; our gaze is entirely focused on her. Such is the quality of visual art; a big part of it serves as the setting and background against which the protagonist appears. Here, the Africans serve as a stage set for the protagonist, making up motifs that are iconographic and intertextual quota-

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15 In *Vår teatrale tid* Anne Britt Gran categorizes postmodern identity in three ways: The term non-theatrical identity presupposes the possibility of authentic identity; explicit theatrical identity presupposes the opposite. This term considers identity to be staged, therefore it is possible to change roles and create different identities. Not explicit theatrical identity is quite similar but has a stronger element of self-reflexivity (GRAN: 2004, 43).

tions from colonial presentations of Africa. Therefore, the spectator identifies the protagonist as White Woman by bringing old-fashioned images of Africa into account. The theatrical scene in front of us is displayed inside the paradigm that makes the white race superior to the black. When we are drawn into this game, which is unavoidable when trying to deduce what the white woman in the pictures is doing, we practice racism ourselves. When we interpret, we are activated as practitioners of attitudes that we regard as totally out of date. Still we do it; we recreate the old attitudes that we thought we did not share ourselves, and this make us quite ill at ease.

This uneasy feeling is reinforced by the pictures themselves. Something is wrong. It has to do with the staged attitude of the model, her body language. This White Woman tries to be Queen Sonja in action: professionally pleasant and friendly, interested in whatever she is invited to look at, utterly empathetic, like Princess Märtha Louise at work, or the Swedish singer Carola visiting her nursery orphanage in Brazil, or Julia Roberts as the UNICEF ambassador. The protagonist is staged as though she is consciously acting a part: »Look at me – I'm kind!« she clearly says. »I'm a good person because I help the natives.« Since her attitude is so obviously staged it carries a self-reflexive element: She needs the Africans in order to become this nice person. We can thus conclude that *Aftermath* paves the way for an ethical consideration about the implications of the play. The pictures arouse uneasiness because we, the spectators, become involved in biased preconceptions that we do not accept. When the protagonist is acting out the recognizable role of being good, we are given the opportunity to realize that in this play, the Africans are necessary to confirm White Woman's self-defined image as a nice lady.

Finally, the artwork encourages our sense of uneasiness because the photographs are faked. They are digital works consisting of a certain combination of two different kinds of photographs. The press photographer Trygve Bølstad has covered his own travels in Kenya by means of documentary photographs. Vibeke Tandberg has manipulated his pictures and installed studio portraits of herself in them. Traces of the mounting are clearly visible when we study the way the light falls on her and on the other people in the pictures. The visible seam, demonstrating the construction of two different pictures mounted together, adds an element of self-reflexivity to *Aftermath*. By carrying traces of its production it tells us that we have to relate to the construction. What we see when

we watch Vibeke Tandberg's digitalized version of Trygve Bølstad's documentary is the White Woman as she is constructed, or rather, as we construct her.

In classical photography what we see is regarded as real. The photograph documents what has once been.[16] However, digital photography has challenged the trustworthiness of the photograph. A digital photograph is presented as a photograph and intended to be read as one, but technically speaking it is a combination of digital graphics and conventional photography.[17] However, as Bolter and Grusin point out, every new medium enters into dialogue with the old medium that it replaces.[18] The digital documentary photograph experiments with the border between art photography and documentary photography. It is both documentary and fiction and it is not at all trustworthy. The interpreter is the one creating meaning from the pictures, making up an idea of what ›really‹ was. With respect to *Aftermath,* the spectators tend to overlook the obvious: that the staged protagonist was not really there. Instead we tend to activate the images from the old discourse on Africa and interpret the studio portraits as ›on-location portraits‹ against the background of the documentary photographs.

In the meeting between the digital photograph and its spectators, the spectators are given a highly active part. We activate the content and make the work ›speak‹. With respect to *Aftermath,* we make it talk like the Western colonial discourse on Africa is not dead yet, and that the old-fashioned point of view on women and race is still valid. So we activate the aftermath of colonialism. But *Aftermath* also initiates a certain kind of self-reflection about how we give significance to pictures and what kind of significance we produce. To activate a picture, to make it speak, is like participating in a play that challenges our self-awareness in respect to what kind of meaning we produce. Here, we recreate a discourse we regard as out of date.

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16 In *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* Roland Barthes writes that unlike literature, photography is a documentary genre. Words are fit to create stories; words create fiction. Photography however, carries traces of the person once present for the picture to be taken (BARTHES: 2001 [1980], 105). What Barthes seems to forget is that art photography has traditionally followed the same aesthetic rules for creating mimesis as classical painting.

17 BOLTER and GRUSIN: 1999, 105.

18 See ibid., 50.

In contrast to Karen Blixen, Vibeke Tandberg has not been to Kenya. Nevertheless we let *Aftermath*'s protagonist tell us about her own experience of being a White Woman. Her experience is postulated as if it is timeless and independent of space. However, the model in the pictures is not present in the universe that we create in our imagination. We interpret her as if she is photographed in Africa even though we can observe that she is inserted in the pictures of Kenya, Africa. The documentary photographs are stage sets. In *Out of Africa* the natives are the background on which the protagonist stands out, as in a relief. In *Aftermath* the Africans are part of the stage too, they happen to be used as background for the studio portraits. The White Woman does not share the references of any of the other people shown in *Aftermath* because she is not in the same room, much less the same continent. She is talking about herself, not the Africans. They are just the background on which she can perform different identities.

Posthumous Reputation and Aftermath

In *Out of Africa* as well as in *Aftermath* the protagonist's name is the same as the artist's, which makes both autobiographical. In *Aftermath,* the photographer of the studio portraits is the same as the model in the studio, thus *Aftermath* may be regarded as a series of self-portraits. The original Norwegian title, *Ettermæle*, means posthumous reputation, the story about the life of someone now dead. The English title, *Aftermath,* is less personal. Aftermath is the crop that grows after the harvest is done. The narrative that the pictures create demonstrates the afterlife of the former colonial paradigm. This post-colonial discourse uncontrollably carries yesterday's racism into our own time.

The first exhibition of *Aftermath* included an installation with a portrait of Vibeke Tandberg, a mourning band, a death announcement and an obituary.[19] The installation and portrait stated that Vibeke Tandberg is dead, and that the work documents her life as an aid worker in Kenya, Africa. The spectators are thus invited to interpret *Aftermath* in accordance with the life stories of deceased missionaries who sacrificed the luxury of Europe to live among the godless blacks in the Dark Continent

19 Some of the spectators found the false obituary offensive. It is now deleted from the work. The Norwegian title of the work indicates that the protagonist is dead anyway. However, in English, the death of the protagonist is less obvious in the revised edition.

(the kind of story that contributed to the traditional discourse on Africa). But Vibeke Tandberg is not dead and therefore the artwork is given another layer of meaning. Vibeke Tandberg stages herself in the images that created the colonial discourse.

The staging of the protagonist as a deceased aid-giver is, in aesthetic terms, a quotation from missionary discourse. In this case it is intertwined with the discourse of royalty and the famous. Together they underline the feminine element of the discourse on Africa that is lacking in the works of Stanley, Haggard, Conrad, Hemingway and Greene. Tandberg clarifies what Blixen brought into the tradition: the part of the White Woman.

Blixen's protagonist grows coffee; in *Aftermath* #4 Tandberg is portrayed in a coffee field. The baroness, as Blixen's protagonist is called in *Out of Africa*, builds a lake and puts fish in it; in *Aftermath* #8 Tandberg's protagonist admires the young boys' freshly caught fish. The baroness sets up a school at her farm; in *Aftermath* #5 the protagonist is a schoolteacher. The baroness used to nurse the wounds of her squatters; in *Aftermath* #6 it looks as if the protagonist is doing the same. The baroness's lover used to take her above the savannah in a small airplane; in *Aftermath* #10 the protagonist has just exited a helicopter. The baroness makes a point of enjoying some spare time with the Somali women; in *Aftermath* #2 Tandberg seems to enjoy being part of the black women's circle of conversation. *Aftermath* quotes *Out of Africa* as well as other written tales about colonial Africa by presenting images and motifs that were already given significance in colonial discourse. However, when the same content is exposed to post-colonial remediation, the original signification becomes slightly displaced. I would argue that what *Aftermath* does is to reveal that in the discourse on Africa the feminism of the White Woman is part of an imperial racist project. White Woman's caring approach to black people underlines White Man's conquest of the wilderness. Culturally speaking, it too is equally arrogant.

Aftermath takes our interpreting gaze and makes it a focus of discussion. As spectators we construct the meaning we glean from the pictures.[20] Moreover, the meaning we invest them with is taken from the out-

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20 Tone Selboe rightfully argues for the importance of the gaze in *Out of Africa* (see especially SELBOE: 1995, 118–119). My point is nevertheless that Tandberg's digital photography is a remediation of Blixen's text in such a way that the interpreting gaze is transferred to the spectator.

dated colonial paradigm. We thus make these pictures talk about the White Woman as a culturally arrogant, still active part of an old-fashioned style that ought to be part of history. We make the pictures initiate an ethical reflection about whether it is time to replace the black-and-white and male-female dichotomies. This ethical reflection works retroactively and affects the reading of *Out of Africa* too. It is no longer possible to pretend that the feminist potential in *Out of Africa* compensates for the racism in the book.

Out of Africa might very well be interpreted as a gendered project, but there is no reason to keep on denying that the gendered project is subordinate to imperialism. We have been able to overlook the racism in Blixen by considering it a product of the 1930s. However, Tandberg's digital photography triggers an ethical reflection which points to our own role in activating the old ideas. To change the colonial paradigm we must take notice of what it is about, even in the old works. *Out of Africa* does not lose its value by being read more consciously. Instead, it serves to remind us of how important it is to notice what kind of attitudes art transfers, as well as to study the roots of our own ideas and images. Instead of overlooking racism, we can identify it and notice how the colonial discourse gives us images that we keep on reproducing when interpreting new works.

ARTWORK

TANDBERG, Vibeke: *Aftermath* # 2, 4, 7, 8. C-print, computermontage, 30 x 40 cm, edition of 5. Reproduced with permission from the artist and courtesy of c/o – Atle Gerhardsen. Berlin, 1994.

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